

## Deep Spoilers

By Ryder Windham; Illustration by Ole Sørensen.

A Gungan danced at the starting line, frantically waving a fan of translucent opee fins. The crowd roared within the great bubble of the Otoh Gunga Garden; muting the engines of thirty-two bongo subs as they blasted out of their pens and gurgled onto the water track.

The Otoh Gunga Challenge was open to anyone with a single-engine sub that could achieve a speed of at least 100 longos, fast enough to outrun a klaa fish on its best day. Weapons were not allowed, and military subs were prohibited unless they had been decommissioned. Beyond that, the rules were as wide open as an opee's eyes.

The contending subs had varied designs, but all were rigged for speed. Some were organically engineered monobubbles, with single hydrostatic field canopies to protect the cockpits. Others were the more prevalent tribubbles, with their port and starboard compartments sealed and flooded. This left the "blinded" sub with only the forward cockpit bubble, enabling the power unit to direct more energy to the electromotive field generators. Some cockpits carried three Gungans, but most contained a single pilot.

The bongos sped out of the launch pool and into the half-kilometer-long water-filled race tube that wrapped around lower interior of the Otoh Gunga Garden. The race tube led to a portal that emptied into Lake Paonga, where the race would continue. Commanding the early lead was the *Opee Fleer*, a decommissioned military sub with a crew of three. Compared to the sleeker designs, it was a cumbersome vessel that needed

to slow down to make the sharper turns, but its breadth made it difficult for other subs to pass it in the narrow race tube. Pursuing the *Opee Fleer* were three blinded monobubbles piloted by Tup Tup Grizbain, Friggy Squig, and Zak "Squidfella" Quiglee. After them came the purple custom-grown monobubble bongo helmed by Brooboo Seep, the oldest pilot in the race and favored by many on the Rep Council.

The first five subs tore through the portal and into the dark waters of Lake Paonga. Spectators in Otoh Gunga Garden quickly redirected their eyes to the large orb-shaped monitors suspended from the arena bubble's ceiling, but others kept their gaze on two subs that were still heading for the portal, operated by Spleed Nukkels and Neb Neb Goodrow.

Humming to herself as she weaved past a broad-bellied bongo, Spleed Nukkels felt downright cozy in her blue blinded monobubble, with its distinctive elongated forward diving plane. Her wake flipped the broad-bellied bongo into a roll, spinning it toward the green, custom monobubble bongo hounding her tail. In the green bongo, Neb Neb Goodrow was chewing on a stick of gimer bark. Neb Neb's bongo had a bulked-up engine with rotating, clipped electromotive fins that allowed for tight turns. Certainly it was not the design of these two bongos that captivated spectators; rather, it was the reckless manner in which the two Gungans steered them.

As Spleed and Neb Neb accelerated through the race tube, other bongos got out of their way. By the time they reached the portal for Lake Paonga, they were traveling side by side and had left a dangerously churning wake behind them. While the trailing bongos slowed to navigate through the swirling bubble trail, Spleed and Neb Neb bolted after the leading subs.

Early in their racing careers, Spleed and Neb Neb had been accused of collusion by their competitors. Working together to ram or drive other bongos off course was not allowed in any official competition. These accusations ended after race officials reviewed recordings of



the two in action, and determined that Spleed and Neb Neb were indeed competing against each another. The problem was that they weren't competing with anyone else. As Spleed had been widely quoted, "Mesa racen Neb Neb Goodrow. Everybody else just inda way."

Not surprisingly, several bongo racers had submitted requests to have Neb Neb and Spleed banned from the sport. The common gripe was that they were too reckless, that they had given the sport a bad name. Squidfella Quiglee stressed that unless officials revised the rules of the game, it was only a matter of time before Neb Neb and Spleed's breakneck antics got somebody pasted. Responding to Squidfella's accusations, Spleed commented that any racer who worried about getting pasted should stay at home. Neb Neb laughed, adding, "Squidfella's got mesa un Spleed all wrongo. Mabee wesa lookkee reckless, boot it taken a lotta skill to blast past da otter racers un let dem live."

Squidfella Quiglee had gone so far as to file official charges, cosigned by his fellow whiners, Tup Tup Grizbain and Friggy Squig. Unfortunately for the disgruntled trio, the charges were tossed out by the Gungan race commissioner and never reached the Rep Council.

The *Opee Fleeer* maintained its lead and was the first bongo to reach the buoy making a confident, wide turn before heading for the next transport tube, a floating construct tethered to the lake floor. The tube had a larger diameter than the one in Otoh Gunga Garden, and its five-kilometer length spiraled downward along the continental slope to the water-filled underwaterways below Lake Paonga. Dozens of orb-shaped *remote-seein* devices floated beside the transparent tube, ready to broadcast images of the race to the spectators in Otoh Gunga Garden.

With a great burst of speed, the *Opee Fleeer* shot into the transparent tube, followed by Squidfella, Tup Tup, and Friggy. Seconds later, Brooboo Seep's bongo entered the tube. Brooboo had his eyestalks trained on the tail of Friggy's craft when Neb Neb's green bongo shot underneath him, its wake propelling Brooboo toward the tube's ceiling. Brooboo pushed down hard on his controls, sending his craft into an angled dive. Spleed's blinded monobubble soared over his canopy and forced him to execute a tight roll to avoid collision. As Brooboo straightened out and watched Spleed's blue bongo zoom ahead of him, he realized he was holding his breath. He sucked in some air, briefly wondered whether he should retire from bongo racing, then stomped on the accelerator. Spleed shot past Neb Neb and came up fast behind Friggy. She did not have to look at her navigation sensor field indicator to know that Neb Neb was right behind her and would try to overtake her before reaching the end of the tube. Even if she had looked at her sensor, it would have been of little use, since it was still broken from the *last* race. In front of Spleed, Friggy was maintaining a long *twisty*, steering his sub through a controlled roll in an effort to prevent Spleed from passing him.

"Tube hog," Spleed muttered, then sped forward, aiming for Friggy's fins.

Seated in his spectator box in the Otoh Gunga Garden bubble, Boss Nass grinned as the bongos -- visible on the Garden's large monitors -- careened through the race tube in Lake Paonga. However, the ruler of Otoh Gunga was not looking at the monitors but at the gathered crowd. Naturally, many of them were, like himself, Gungan bongo racing fans, but there was also a new element to the audience.

*Tourists.*

And not just the human population of Naboo, although they were well represented in Otoh Gunga Garden that night. Boss Nass had to admit that he would have had difficulty distinguishing one humanoid species from the next were it not for their clothes. In his eyes, the Naboo dressed better.

Since the Battle of Naboo, word had spread of the courageous and resourceful people that had crushed the Neimoidian Trade Federation. Although Boss Nass was immensely pleased and proud of his alliance with the humans of Naboo, he was even more delighted by the countless representatives of Republic planets who had contacted him personally, requesting visits to Otoh Gunga and audience with the Boss who commanded the Grand Gungan Army. With great discretion, Boss Nass had asked around about whether Theed had received as many requests from *outlanders*. If the information he had gained were true, Otoh Gunga was definitely the more popular destination.

As *it showdabe*, he thought -- and without any malice whatsoever to the brave citizens of Theed. Theed was a city rooted in soil and exposed to sky, like so many other cities on Republic worlds. Otoh Gunga, on the other hand, was mysterious. Far below the surface of Lake Paonga, Otoh Gunga was unaffected by clouds or starlight, representing the most advanced underwater civilization in the known galaxy.

Boss Nass narrowed his eyes and surveyed the crowd. He recognized some of the more distinctive alien species, including contingents from Duros and Moonus Mandel, who waved penants that displayed the names of their favorite racers. It seemed that everyone had been caught up by Bongomania.

Boss Nass noticed one of his advisors, Rep Teers, hopping up to his box. Rep Teers leaned close to Boss Nass and said, "Da Ithorian ambassador sayen dat da Otoh Gunga Challenge is mure exciten dan da Podracen on Malastare!"

Boss Nass grinned. He did not know anything about Podracing, but if the Ithorian ambassador thought it was inferior to bongo racing, that was good enough for the Boss.

Suddenly the crowd gasped, and Boss Nass followed their collective gaze to the monitors. "What gooie-on?!" Boss Nass demanded. "Where da replay?"

Boss Nass had missed a crash in the race tube.

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"Ouches," Neb Neb Goodrow commented as he steered deftly past the wreckage of Friggy Squig's bongo, just before the organic race tube -- engineered to eject slow-moving objects -- opened at the side and spat the demolished sub and its seething pilot into Lake Paonga.

Neb Neb wondered, *What was dot lame-noggin tinken?!* Anyone who perpetrated a *twisty* in front of Spleed Nukkels was about as stupid as... well, Neb Neb was at a loss for an appropriate metaphor. Sometimes, Neb Neb suspected that Spleed lived to teach painful lessons to show-offs like Friggy. The instant Spleed's extended diving plane had tapped Friggy's fins, she threw her sub forward and pulled up sharply, forcing his fins back against the underside of her bongo. Friggy might as well have steered into the side of the tube on purpose.

Distracted by Friggy's lack of brains, Neb Neb almost did not see Brooboo Seep creeping up along his starboard side. Neb Neb wagged his side stabilizers, which alarmed Brooboo and made him slow down, then sped after Spleed's bongo.

Spleed was right behind Squidfella Quiglee and Tup Tup Grizbain, who were swerving along the interior of the tube, apparently working together to prevent Spleed from slipping past. Neb Neb dropped below Spleed and maneuvered into a narrow opening between Squidfella and Tup Tup's bongos. Neb Neb heard his engines whine as he swooshed between his rivals and was swept up in the wake of the *Opee Fleeer*, which was nearing the race tube's exit. As the *Opee Fleeer* approached the mouth of the tube, Neb Neb deftly hurtled past the larger sub and maneuvered in front of it, then swerved out of the tube and into Lake Paonga.

The *Opee Fleeer* hit Neb Neb's hard wake, shuddered, and slowed. The over-eager Tup Tup slammed into the larger sub's stern, nearly pulverizing both bongos. Squidfella frantically steered his bongo past the disabled vessels and miraculously exited the tube without damage.

Spleed shot from the tube after Squidfella and Neb Neb, stealing a glance to check on the other racers. She spotted Tup Tup, who had abandoned his damaged bongo and was rising up to the surface in his escape bubble. Then she locked eyes on the cockpit of the *Opee Fleeer*, in which three irate Gungans seemed on the verge of strangling one another.

Spleed steered through an open crevice and plunged into the dark depths. She caught sight of Squidfella's navigational lights and chased his bongo, gliding past a school of luminescent fish. Spleed couldn't spot any *remote-seein* devices in the crevice, but a moment later she saw why: An electric kreetch eel was chomping on the last one -- quite a disappointment to the eager spectators back at Otoh Gunga Garden.

The eel ignored her, so Spleed accelerated and came up alongside Squidfella's bongo. Perhaps Squidfella had noticed that the *remote-seein* devices had been eaten, or maybe he was frustrated with Spleed's tenacity. In any event, without any spectators watching over him, he smiled at Spleed, swung his bongo to the side, and rammed her hard.

Spleed gritted her teeth but kept her composure, swerving in front of Squidfella. Up ahead, she saw Neb Neb's bongo angling through the cavern. Squidfella rammed her again. This time Spleed slowed down, figuring that she would let the goon pass her, but then felt Squidfella's bongo slam her a third time.

He wasn't passing.

Spleed flashed her navigational lights three times at Neb Neb, signalling him that she was in trouble. Traditionally, racers used the signal to warn others of dangerous beasts, but under the circumstances, the signal seemed in order. Squidfella slammed her bongo again, shorting her lights. Spleed didn't want to be anywhere near him, but she didn't much like the idea of flitting about in the cavern without lights.

Fortunately, she still had engine power. She tightened her grip on the controls and sped after Neb Neb's sub, with Squidfella chomping at her fins.

She lost sight of Neb Neb's sub, the only light source coming from Squidfella's bongo behind her. She threw her sub into reverse and bounced off Squidfella's hull.

Bright lights appeared from behind a jagged outcropping of volcanic rock up ahead. Spleed could see Neb Neb's bongo. He had seen her signal after all and turned about. Neb Neb sized up the situation in an instant and headed for Squidfella, aiming his forward diving plane at Squidfella's cockpit canopy. Squidfella's eyes went wide as his rival's diving plane pierced one of the canopy braces. Spleed spun around in time to see the momentary collision, a flash of light, and the look of horror on Squidfella's face as water sprayed him through cracks in his canopy.

While Squidfella tried to secure the canopy and halt the leak, Neb Neb and Spleed gazed out through their own hydrostatic canopies to see Brooboo Seep tooling through the open water in their direction.

Spleed's navigational lights came on, as if on cue. She smiled and stuck her tongue out at Neb Neb, and then both took off, leaving Squidfella with his sinking sub.

Brooboo Seep's purple bongo was now in the lead, followed by Neb Neb and Spleed. Brooboo emerged from the crevice, returning to Lake Paonga, then skirted around a marker buoy and headed for an underwater mountain. The racers veered toward a narrow, rock-walled tunnel cut through the base of the mountain that would take them back to Otoh Gunga Garden and the finish line.

Neb Neb and Spleed cleared the crevice and chased after Brooboo. The three submersibles knifed through the deep water, racing over the mountain's foothills and toward the passage. Several *remote-seein'* devices bobbed around the tunnel's entrance. Neb Neb's sub lifted and rolled. The daring Gungan felt his long earlobes flop against the ceiling of his upside-down bongo's canopy, and he stomped on the accelerator. The roll was a deliberate, perhaps even clever attempt to make an inverted pass over the Brooboo's bongo and gain the lead. There was only one problem with Neb Neb's tactic: Spleed was attempting the exact same maneuver.

The collision was spectacular. There was a loud *whummf* as a bright spark flared between Neb Neb and Spleed's bongos, which had swung directly over Brooboo Seep's sub, and an explosion of bubbles spilled outward in all directions. The blast pushed down on Brooboo's bongo, tearing at his sub's rotating fins and causing him to swerve, but Brooboo held his course.

Neb Neb and Spleed were less fortunate. Spleed's forward diving plane had been sheared off; Neb Neb's starboard buoyancy tank had ruptured, and both subs were spinning toward the jagged cliffs of the underwater mountain. As Brooboo vanished into the tunnel's dark orifice, Neb Neb and Spleed punched their respective ejectors, and both pilots -- still contained within their hydrostatic cockpit bubbles -- were catapulted, seats and all, away from their subs. A split second later, their bongos crashed into the mountain, spraying debris across the lake floor.

The two ejected bubbles carried their occupants up from the depths, rising with a current that flowed past the side of the mountain. The bubbles were close enough that Neb Neb and Spleed could see each other, and they exchanged knowing glances. Having crashed in previous competitions, they could easily anticipate what would happen next. They would have to face their sponsors, who would no doubt be angered at the loss of the expensive bongos. Then there would be the outcries from the sport's critics. Dubbed by bongo racers as "fun-boggers," these were the clean-up squads and safety consultants, conservation groups and concerned parents, all of whom would be relieved and delighted were bongo racing abolished.

Despite these concerns, both Neb Neb and Spleed took certain comfort in one additional bit of knowledge: They were famous. By the next Otoh Gunga Challenge, some race enthusiasts would have to consult a datapad to recall that Brooboo Seep had claimed the last trophy, but nobody would forget the incredible crash and the two Gungans who had survived it.

Neb Neb and Spleed's hydrostatic spheres broke the water's surface, and the Gungans squinted at the brightness of the daylight sky. They deactivated the upper half of their spheres, leaving each of them sitting in a transparent saucer. Although neither had won the race, both had survived, which was reason enough to perform their post-race ritual. As they were rocking with the waves in their floating hemispheres, the ritual's degree of difficulty was increased greatly, but both believed that to forego the ritual would almost certainly bring bad luck.

Neb Neb and Spleed faced each other, nodded once, then spoke simultaneously: "Mayda bubbles always bees behind yous." Then they cocked back their necks, hawked, and spat high into the air. With some satisfaction, they watched the twin gobs of saliva arc over the water and collide with a stomach-churning splat. Their aim was true and their good luck was intact.

Or so they thought.

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"Yousa revoked uss-ens bongo licenses?!" exclaimed Spleed, who stood beside Neb Neb in the Otoh Gunga office of the bongo race commissioner, Cova Burmooze. Hearing the words "revoked" and "licenses" in the same sentence, Neb Neb looked like he was about to fall ill. It was bad enough that Cova didn't believe a word they'd said about Squidfella Quiglee. It was even worse that Squidfella's bongo had been found empty in the crevice, and that no one had seen him since the race. Even worse was the fact that Neb Neb and Spleed were widely suspected of having killed Squidfella in the crevice. But now, having their licenses revoked ... well, that was the very worst indeed.

"Da Rep Council," Cova informed the devastated pair, "also suggest-ed yousa showdabe thrown inda lock-up place until wesa know Squidfella Quiglee isa live, boot Boss Nass say dare gotta be mure evidence. Still, a lotta Gungans isa callen youse deep spoilers, un a lotta elders isa pitty irate wit yousa for boomin yousa bongos into da mountain."

"Dey wowdabe mure heppy if wesa got pasted?" Neb Neb asked with genuine concern, unphased by Cova's remark about "deep spoilers." Neb Neb and Spleed had heard that one before.

Cova shrugged. "Da elders say da moutain is sacred."

"Sacred?!" Spleed sputtered. "Wesa broken no rules! Wesa no da ones dat putta tunnel through dat mountain! Since when is dare no crashen law in an official bongo race?"

Cova ignored Neb Neb's remarks. "Yousa duey crash-ed at da wrongo time. Da Rep Council gotta complaints about bongo racen. Some sayen too noisy, some sayen too messy, some sayen possible maxibad gamblin and corruption--"

"Gamblin and corruption?!" echoed the racers.

"Dat's right," Cova said, and his fixed gaze carried a hint of casual suspicion. "Dare's some sayen dat you duey throwen da races un crashen ... on purpose."

The accusation hit Spleed and Neb Neb like a blast of hot air. Eyes wide and earlobes tensed, Spleed protested, "Yousa tink sumbotty payen uss-ens to crash? Den yousa tell me whosa dat sumbotty is, causen mesa wanten to see dem clams!"

Before the race commissioner could respond, Neb Neb held out his hands, palms exposed. "Lookee, Cova," he said.

"Wesa got nutten to hide. Yousa wanna investigate uss-ens? Do it!"

Cova drummed his thick fingers on the top of his desk. "Yousa tellen mesa dat yousa always rilly racen to win?"

"Absolootly!" Neb Neb answered without hesitation. "Wesa nebbber competen to lose!"

"So all-n yous crashes ... ?"

"Axadentes happen," said Spleed.

Apparently skeptical, Cova said, "Axadentes, huh? What if some say both-n yous no lucky un clumsy?"

"Haw!" Neb Neb laughed. "Wesa da luckiest un da moto skilled too! If wesa no lucky un clumsy, how comen wesa still breathin, standen hair in yous office, instedda maken liken fish food?"

Cova clapped his hands together and smiled. "Yousa lucky, all right. Boss Nass liken bongo racen, un tink yous duey is good sports. Dat's why he talkie tooda Council, un tell dem dat youse only ganna get a short suspension."

"How longo is a short suspension?" asked Neb Neb.

Cova grinned. "Mesa tink youse be back in da races just as soonest yousa do Boss Nass a favor."

Spleed gulped. "A favor? For da Boss?"

"Dat's right," said Cova. "It involves hisen old heyblibber."

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Major Fassa met Captain Tarpals in front of a crowded restaurant bubble that adjoined the City Bigspace. Fassa wore a civilian outfit and could not help but frown when she saw that the kaadu patrol chief was still in uniform. "Yousa worken overtime," she said.

Tarpals nodded. "Sumptin come up."

"Seems liken sumptin always comen up. Any word about Squidfella Quiglee?"

"Noyet," Tarpals replied. "Patrols still lookee for him."

Fassa noticed that Tarpals was carrying a small rolled scroll, and asked, "What's dat."

"A message from Boss Nass. My have to take it to Lob Dizz."

"My take da message to Dizz for yousa," Fassa offered.

"Tanks," Tarpals said as he handed the scroll to Fassa. "Boot firstest, let's take-a walk."

Leaving the restaurant bubble, they entered the City Bigspace and stepped onto the Grand Walkway. In every direction wandered hundreds of tourists. Many of them were first-time visitors to Otoh Gunga, and several were clearly neither Gungans nor Naboo. In the aftermath of the Battle of Naboo, the ambassadors of other Republic planets had taken a keen interest in Naboo culture, Otoh Gunga in particular. At the sight of two humanoids exchanging a long kiss before a Gungan ceremonial fountain, Tarpals winced.

"Da tings some people do in public," Tarpals commented.

"My tinks daza honeymoonen," said Fassa.

"Honeymoonen?" said Tarpals. "What's dat?"

"Mesa nut surr," Fassa said, "boot mesa hear talken. Word is dat *outlaunders* tink dat Otoh Gunga is `good place for honeymoonen."

Tarpals stole a quick glance back at the kissing couple, who remained locked in a tight embrace. "My wonder if dat meanen honeymoonen is no good in otter places. Mabee some places it even illegal."

Fassa stopped walking and said, "What gooie-on,Tarpals. Yousa tryen to tell mesa sumptin?"

Tarpals gazed into Fassa's eyes, then looked away. "Tings is changen too fast in dis city," he said at last. "At firstest, mesa tinken dat some change is good. Bein friends wit da Naboo seemed liken good ting, un still seems liken a good ting. Boot all dese otter beings ... Fassa, daza drivin mesa nutsen."

"What?" Fassa said, surprised by Tarpals' admission.

"Moto of dem is okeyday," Tarpals continued. "Boot some ... dey bringen dair own food un talkie-ways. Dey traden garments wit uss-ens, boot dair garments isa no good for wearin underwater. Dey comen hair to get a lookkee round, boot dey no learn da local laws or customs. Dey walk where dey no supposed to walk, un mesa tinks dat some of dem been swipen locap plants." Tarpals shook his head.

"In otter words," Fassa interjected, "Yousa confound-ed becausen some *outlaunders* got no respect for uss-ens culture?"

Tarpals nodded. Fassa beamed. "Den yousa no avoiden mesa becausen mesa uncle is Boss Nass?"

"What?" Tarpals gasped, lifting the lids of his eyestalks. "Doan be ridiculous. Mesa beyond all dat." Then Tarpals looked past Fassa's shoulder and said "Uh-oh."

"What yet?"

"Duty callen," Tarpals snarled as he moved away from Fassa. "Dat honeymoonen couple just climb-ed into da ceremonial fountain."

Fassa watched Tarpals walk toward the soaking couple, then looked down at the rolled scroll in her hand. Deciding that she didn't want to wait around for Tarpals, she turned to exit the City Bigspace and headed for Lob Dizz's laboratory bubble.

Lob Dizz was one of the most respected engineers in Otoh Gunga, especially for her expertise with bongo propulsion systems. She was passionate about her work, and most of her assignments were official jobs for the Otoh Gunga Transit Authority or Grand Gungan Army. Her current project was more personal in nature; Boss Nass had asked her to see whether she could do something with the engine to his old heyblibber, the luxury sub that had been totaled by Jar Jar Binks.

Specifically, Boss Nass wanted the heyblibber's engine restored and installed into a tribubble racing bongo. He also had some specific ideas about the bongo's design, insisting on the input of a pair of racers. Lob Dizz had agreed, but when she had learned that the two racers were Spleed Nukkels and Neb Neb Goodrow, she immediately wondered whether Boss Nass were trying to punish her.

Lob Dizz heard rumors that Spleed and Neb Neb might know something about the disappearance of Squidfella Quiglee, but she didn't believe them. In all fairness, she liked Spleed and Neb Neb. She had dealt with them in the past and had employed them as test pilots, but that was before their recent string of crashes. Although Spleed and Neb Neb had never damaged any of Lob Dizz's prototypes, their reputation as crash survivors did not inspire much confidence.

As the engineer watched Spleed and Neb Neb at work in the sub pen that neighbored her laboratory, she figured that Boss Nass might not be trying to punish her after all. Perhaps the Boss intended to use the pair's cleverness and teamwork in more productive ways. The two racers had thrown themselves into their assignment with great enthusiasm and had offered several good ideas for increasing speed and navigational control. The main problem was working with the heyblibber engine itself, as the power unit had been originally engineered for a sub that had been quite a bit larger and longer than a typical bongo. Instead of being frustrated by the challenge, Spleed and Neb Nebb were thrilled by it.

"Pliz hand mesa dat flik-tweezer, Spleed," Neb Neb said from his station atop of the bongo, just behind the cockpit, where he was trying to tighten a brace on the sub's main hydrostatic field generator. The new bongo was floating in the sub pen's central work-pool, and Spleed stood in the water at the bongo's port side. Spleed passed the tool up to Neb Neb, who commented, "Dis bongo is ganna rip da slippity come next blur-spin."

"Mure clan dat," Spleed responded as she broke off a fresh rod for the sub's port trim control oil cyclers. "After wesa snap da snout un shave da flippies, dis swimmer's ganna do some bombad plorkscrewen dat'll leave da fun-boggers cryen dry!"

Lobb Dizz closed her eyes and shook her head, trying to purge the lingo-riddled banter from her skull. Except for the word "bongo," she couldn't fully grasp what they were talking about.

There was a heavy knock at the sub pen entrance, and Lobb Dizz turned to see a female Gungan under the arched doorway. "Major Fassa! Mesa almos no reckonize yousa outta uniform."

"Mesa on short leave," Fassa said as she stepped forward and handed the scroll to Lobb Dizz. "Dis for yousa from Boss Nass."

Lobb Dizz unrolled the scroll, read the message, and sighed. "Da Boss wanten to take hisen new bongo for a test plunge tomorrow."

Fassa looked at the bongo floating in the pool and nodded at Neb Neb and Spleed. "So, dat's mesa uncle's newest toy, huh?"

"Toy?" Spleed said. "Wit all due rispict, Major Fassa, dis no toy! Dis bongo ganna make Boss Nass da Boss Nastiest!"

"Is ganna *what*?" Lob Dizz said with some alarm. "Yousa tryen to maken da Boss angry?"

Neb Neb chuckled. "No worry, Dizz. Spleed no meanen da Boss ganna be angry. "'Nasti-est' meanen no sluggin un sleepen, da exspeediest un moto maxi-bombad bongo on Naboo."

Lob Dizz looked at Fassa and asked, "Yousa know what daza sayen?"

"Sorta," Fassa admitted, and her tone revealed that she did not like the sound of it. If Boss Nass wound up owning the fastest bongo on Naboo, his head would swell so much that he would require a larger crown.

A squawk sounded from Lob Dizz's communications console and a voice barked, "Lobb Dizz, yousa dare?"

"Yep, my hair," Lobb Dizz said into the comm.

"Dis Wilk Nilkers of da Cleanup Squad," the voice bellowed. "Wesa gotta 'mergency. An *outlaunder* at da Bigspace Hotel axadently flush-ed some boiled quench weed down a wastepot, un now all da hotel's waste pipes is stuck shut."

In the sub pen, all four Gungans groaned. It was common knowledge that flushing even a small amount of boiled quench weed down a waste-pot would plug up the waste pipes for days. Not even the most simple-minded Gungan would do something so foolish.

"Lousy tourists," Lob Dizz grumbled into the comm. "My on mesa way." Lob Dizz grabbed her utility bag and headed for the doorway, then stopped, turned to Fassa, and whispered, "Pliz stay hair til mesa get back. My afraid if nobody watch dem, Neb Neb un Spleed is ganna taken da bongo out for a test run."

"Okeyday," Fassa said. She didn't have any other plans anyway. As she watched Lob Dizz leave, she caught sight of a large object gliding past the exterior of the laboratory bubble.

It was a military bongo. And Squidfella Quiglee was in the cockpit.

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It hadn't been easy for Squidfella Quiglee to return to Otoh Gunga and evade detection after the race. It had been even more difficult to steal a military bongo from a Gungan Grand Army sub pen and locate Neb Neb and Spleed. But Squidfella was determined, and he knew his way around pretty well. He wanted to restore a good reputation to the sport of bongo racing by making sure that Neb Neb and Spleed would never compete again.

Squidfella had faked the call from "Wilk Nilkers of da Cleanup Squad" to get Lobb Dizz out of her laboratory bubble. From the military bongo, Squidfella peered across the watery expanse that seperated him from the bubble and had seen Lobb Dizz grab her utility bag and leave. He had hoped that the other Gungan who had just arrived -- a female whom he didn't recognize -- would leave with Lobb Dizz, but when she stayed behind, all Squidfella could do was shrug. "Yousa win some..."

Squidfella fired an energy torpedo squarely at Lob Dizz's bubble. "... and yousa losen some."

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"Get down!" Fassa shouted as she hit the floor and rolled under a sturdy table. Spleed and Neb Neb flinched at Fassa's command and snapped their heads to look in her direction.

There was a loud explosion as the energy torpedo detonated against one of the bubble's utanode braces. The bubble's hydrostatic field flickered, and a brief, hard shower of lake water thundered down into the bubble's interior before the emergency generator kicked in and restored the field.

Soaking wet, Fassa sprang out from under the table. Neb Neb had been driven headfirst into the open cockpit of the bongo, and Spleed was cursing as she hopped out of the work-pool. Fassa looked out through the bubble's transparent walls, trying to locate the military bongo, but water was still fizzling against the re-energized hydrostatic field and she couldn't see a thing.

"What da boom-hey happened?!" Neb Neb shouted as he righted himself in the cockpit.

"Wesa under attack!" Fassa answered. "Wesa gotta get outta hair!" Eyeing Boss Nass' bongo, she asked with some urgency, "Dat ting worken or what?"

Neb Neb slid into the pilot's seat, punched the ignition, and Boss Nass's bongo engine roared to life. "Hop in," said Neb Neb as he quickly secured his safety harness.

Fassa and Spleed leaped up to the bongo and scrambled into the cockpit. Fassa had intended to take the navigator's position, but Spleed beat her to it and Fassa fell back into the roomy rear seat. A moment after Fassa activated the bongo's cockpit bubble, the sub pen was struck by a second energy torpedo, and more lake water came pounding down, hammering the hull of Boss Nass' bongo.

Neb Neb rotated the bongo so its nose pointed at the exit portal, then threw the sub forward, launching it through the gossamer sphincter and into Lake Paonga. Even though Spleed and Neb Neb knew the bongo would be fast, they were surprised when they felt their bodies press back into their seats. "Whosa tryen to paste uss-ens?" Neb Neb asked as he steered away from the lab bubble and the underwater city.

"Squidfella Quiglee got hisself a militia-bongo," Fassa replied.

"What-a weenee," Spleed commented as she scanned the sub's sensor screen, happy to have a working one for a change. A red dot was moving fast toward their position, and Spleed said, "Boomer-blip comen in speedest onda starboard."

Neb Neb steered the bongo into a steep climb, and Fassa looked out through the cockpit canopy, watching as an energy torpedo sailed under and away from them. As Neb Neb looped the sub back toward their attacker, he heard the torpedo explode on the lake floor. Outside the cockpit, the militia-bongo came into view.

Neb Neb headed straight for it.

In the Grand Gungan Army, Fassa was known for her unflappable calm under pressure. However, in all her experience, she'd never been in a bongo with Spleed Nukkels and Neb Neb Goodrow. Clutching the armrests of the rear seat, Fassa gasped, "What yousa doen?"

Neb Neb's voice was calm as he answered, "Squidfella's borer da daylights outta mesa."

The militia-bongo began angling to face the incoming sub, but its speed was no match for Boss Nass's bongo. Neb Neb rolled and sped for the militia-bongo's stern.

"Hang onto yousa thumbs," Spleed advised as she tightened her safety harness.

As per Boss Nass's instructions, the bongo's forward diving plane and skeletal structure had been heavily reinforced. Boss Nass had wanted the bongo to be extra durable as well as fast, and Spleed and Neb Neb had been happy to oblige. With a bone-jarring impact, Neb Neb slammed into the rotating dome at the base of the militia-bongo's fins. The reinforced diving plane sheared through the dome, effectively separating the militia-bongo's fins from its body. Fassa glanced back through her cockpit canopy and saw the fins whip back through the water and smash into the militia-bongo.

Fassa was speechless.

"Un dat," Neb Neb said, "isa howta rilly take out da competition." He decelerated and circled back to inspect the damage. The militia-bongo and its severed fins were floating dead in the water. Squidfella was visible inside his cockpit, unconscious and slumped over the controls.



Happy to be alive, Spleed and Neb Neb turned to face each other and said simultaneously, "Mayda bubbles always bees behind yous." Then they hawked and spat.

In the back seat, Fassa said, "Yuck."

Wiping off his face, Neb Neb said, "Mabee da good-lucky ritual a no smart idea when wesa sitten so close."

\* \* \*

Boss Nass was mortified when Lob Dizz informed him that her laboratory bubble was destroyed and his bongo was missing. But when Major Fassa returned and informed him of the details, the Boss was relieved that no one had been seriously injured. He was also delighted that his bongo had performed so admirably in the apprehension of Squidfella Quiglee.

For stealing the militia-bongo, endangering Major Fassa, and firing on Otoh Gunga, Squidfella was banned from bongo racing and sent to a remote correctional clinic. Despite all that he'd done, Neb Neb Goodrow and Spleed Nukkels bore him no grudge and hoped that proper counseling would eventually lead to his rehabilitation.

Although there was some protest from a few members of the Gungan Rep Council, Spleed and Neb Neb had their bongo licenses reinstated. Boss Nass referred to them as vital players in a sport that was drawing intergalactic attention, and he looked forward to seeing more tourists come to Otoh Gunga.

When Captain Tarpals learned of Boss Nass's plans to further promote tourism, he proposed that clearly posted warning signs -- written in Basic -- might keep the outlanders from getting into trouble. Boss Nass didn't much like the idea of warning signs all over Otoh Gunga and told Tarpals he'd think about it.

In their very next race, Spleed and Neb Neb survived yet another explosive collision. Their fans were hardly surprised, but delighted just the same.